



## **GREAT EXPECTATIONS AMERICA AND EUROPE AFTER THE ELECTIONS**

**Marcin Zaborowski**

European expectations about post-Bush America are running high. Like the rest of the world Europeans are gripped by Obamamania. Views on a possible win by John McCain, whilst clearly not the preferred option in Europe, are overall positive too. The truth is that the Europeans can't wait to see the back of George W. Bush and that they expect that things can only get better with his successor. American expectations about future co-operation with Europe are also considerable. John McCain has already travelled to Europe after securing his nomination and Barack Obama is about to come too. Both McCain and Obama made efforts to reach out to the Europeans to secure their cooperation on a range of issues, including Afghanistan, Iran and climate change.

Are things really likely to get better after eight tense and unhappy years in transatlantic relations? Indeed it is likely that relations between Europe and the US will improve. Bush never really cared or showed much interest in Europe. His foreign policy was ostentatiously unilateral. Both Obama and to a larger extent McCain (who unlike Obama referred directly to the EU) speak with respect about Europe. Both candidates refer to multilateralism, although, Obama is probably more genuine in this, or rather his understanding of multilateralism is closer to that of Europeans. Both Obama and McCain want to enter into new and stronger arms control agreements with Russia. Both candidates are 'greener' than Bush – they do not deny that climate change is happening and both are in favour of introducing compulsory caps on greenhouse emissions. Finally, for Poland and other countries that are in favour of Ukraine's and Georgia's integration with NATO, it is reassuring that both Obama and McCain supported NATO's expansion to these countries.

As for the Europeans, there has already been a considerable rapprochement with the US, prompted by last year's elections in France. Transatlantic understanding on Iran is now deeper than ever before, European contributions to ISAF in Afghanistan have modestly increased and EU-NATO relations could be significantly revitalised should France fully rejoin NATO's integrated military command, which seems fully plausible.

There are indeed some grounds for optimism, but one needs to be careful not to raise too many expectations. For example, those Europeans who expect that America's policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict would change will be disappointed. Few expected that McCain would be more sympathetic to the Palestinian case, but Obama's mixed heritage, the fact that his father was Muslim and his middle name is Hussein, made some believe that he would pursue a more balanced approach.

Recently Obama proved them wrong in his speech to the powerful pro-Israeli AIPAC group, which he delivered only a few hours after winning his nomination. In the speech the Democratic nominee declared that 'Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel' and that it 'must remain undivided'. He also stressed that 'Israel's identity as a Jewish state must be preserved', hence implicitly dismissing the Palestinian 'right of return'.

Some Europeans believe that America's position on Iran will change in the way that would force dialogue on Tehran and defuse tensions in the Gulf. This, again is unlikely. McCain made it clear that he would rather bomb Iran than talk to its leaders. Whilst it is true that Obama took the opposite position and offered unconditional negotiations with the Iranians, he never ruled out the use of force and stressed in his AIPAC speech 'I will do everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon; everything in my power; everything'. So, there is almost no difference between the candidates regarding harsher sanctions against Tehran, including secondary sanctions that the Europeans oppose.

There is also the issue of missile defence installations in Poland and the Czech Republic. John McCain fully supports Bush's plan to place the installations in these countries, in fact, the Republican expressed his support for Poland's demand to up the American offer and strengthen security relations between the two countries. However, Obama is far more sceptical. The Democrat raised argued that it must be proven that the system is workable before he would decide to continue with any further investment in it. Obama also argued that the missile defence system must not 'divide 'new Europe' from 'old Europe', and implying that further negotiations with all European allies were needed. It is therefore possible that, in the case of Obama's victory, the Czechs, and perhaps also the Poles, may find themselves in the situation when the costly deal they signed with the Bush administration is discontinued.

The Americans are also down for some disappointments. It is generally expected in Washington that

with the fresh start, the Europeans would do more to share the burden in Afghanistan and maybe even in Iraq. This is also unlikely to happen. Both operations are unpopular in Europe and defence establishments are concerned about over-stretching their meagre resources.

What can be done to preserve a good momentum in transatlantic relations after the elections? Two things: first, it is important to reassess expectations in a more realistic manner. The next president will be more EU-friendly and more of a multilateralist. If Obama wins, US policy in Iraq is likely to change and this would have implications for the level of the US's presence in Afghanistan. But, no matter who wins many policies would remain the same, including the Middle East and East Asia. Americans too need to realise the limitations on Europe's involvement in Afghanistan. It is difficult to maintain, let alone increase investment in the war that has been hugely unpopular for years. Without a profound change of the nature of this operation this would not alter.

Second, we must be more open about our differences and about the challenges that lie ahead. One can hear these days in Europe that it is best to avoid the mention of Afghanistan or Iraq in our discussions with the Americans, because, we do not have much to offer there and the US expects too much from us. Regardless of whether the EU can or cannot offer anything there, it is clear that relations with the US will not improve just because we pretend that these issues do not exist.

MARCIN ZABOROWSKI is a Senior Research Fellow at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) in Paris, where he deals with Transatlantic relations, US Foreign Policy and East Asia. He was formerly lecturer in International Relations and European Politics at Aston University in the UK from 2001 to 2005, and was Coordinator the Transatlantic Programme at the Centre for International Relations in Warsaw from 2002 to 2004.